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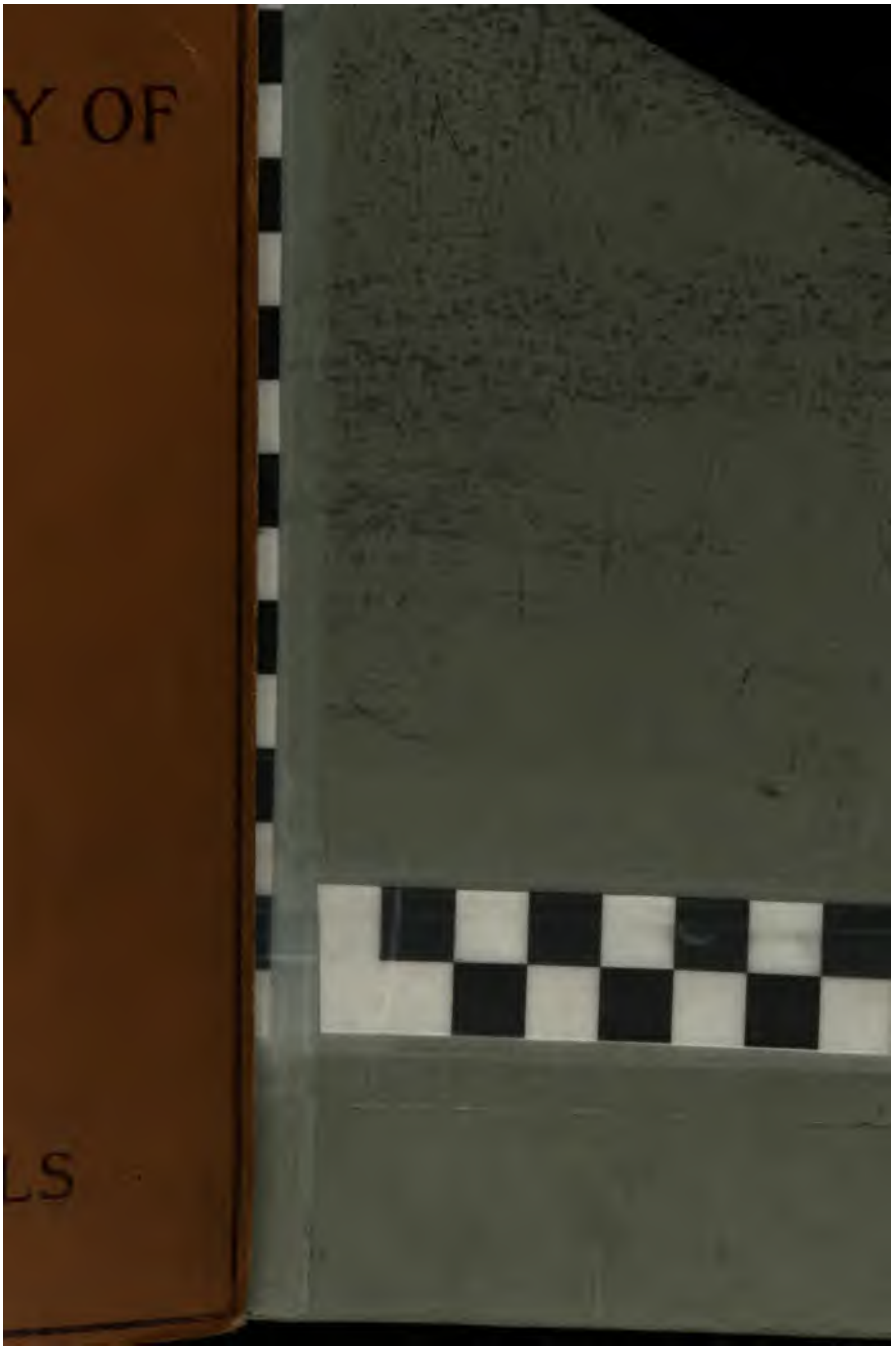
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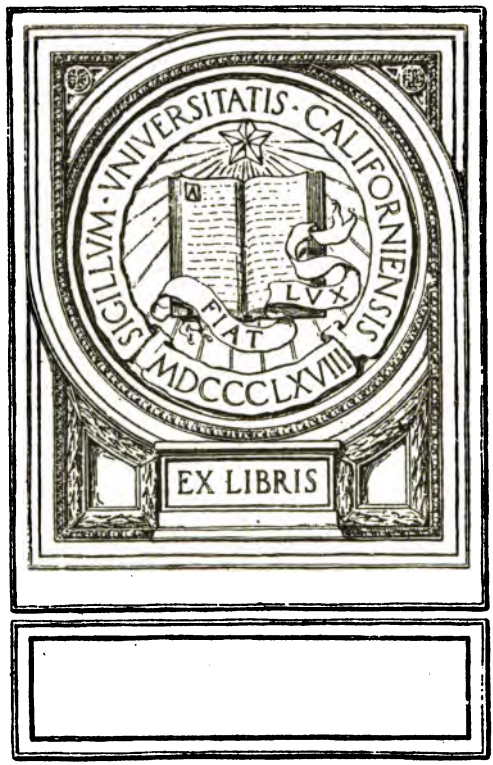
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THIS MISERY *of* BOOTS

BY
H. G. WELLS
Author of "Socialism and the Family," "In the Days of the Comet," "A Modern Utopia," etc.

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THIS MISERY OF BOOTS

CHAPTER I

THE WORLD AS BOOTS AND SUPERSTRUCTURE

"IT does not do," said a friend of mine, "to think about boots." For my own part, I have always been particularly inclined to look at boots, and think about them. I have an odd idea that most general questions can be expressed in terms of foot-wear—which is perhaps why cobblers are often such philosophical men. Accident it may be, gave me this persuasion. A very considerable part of my childhood was spent in an underground kitchen; the window opened upon

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a bricked-in space, surmounted by a grating before my father's shop window. So that, when I looked out of the window, instead of seeing—as children of a higher upbringing would do—the heads and bodies of people, I saw their under side. I got acquainted indeed with all sorts of social types as boots simply, indeed, as the soles of boots; and only subsequently, and with care, have I fitted heads, bodies, and legs to these pediments.

There would come boots and shoes (no doubt holding people) to stare at the shop, finicking, neat little women's boots, good sorts and bad sorts, fresh and new, worn crooked in the tread, patched or needing patching; men's boots, clumsy and fine, rubber shoes, tennis shoes, goloshes. Brown shoes I never beheld—it was before that time; but I have seen pattens. Boots used to come and commune

at the window, duets that marked their emotional development by a restlessness or a kick. . . . But anyhow, that explains my preoccupation with boots.

But my friend did not think it *did,* to think about boots.

My friend was a realistic novelist, and a man from whom hope had departed. I cannot tell you how hope had gone out of his life; some subtle disease of the soul had robbed him at last of any enterprise, or belief in coming things; and he was trying to live the few declining years that lay before him in a sort of bookish comfort, among surroundings that seemed peaceful and beautiful, by not thinking of things that were painful and cruel. And we met a tramp who limped along the lane.

"Chafed heel," I said, when we had parted from him again; "and on these

pebbly byways no man goes barefooted." My friend winced; and a little silence came between us. We were both recalling things; and then for a time, when we began to talk again, until he would have no more of it, we rehearsed the miseries of boots.

We agreed that to a very great majority of people in this country boots are constantly a source of distress, giving pain and discomfort, causing trouble, causing anxiety. We tried to present the thing in a concrete form to our own minds by hazardous statistical inventions. "At the present moment," said I, "one person in ten in these islands is in discomfort through boots."

My friend thought it was nearer one in five.

"In the life of a poor man or a poor man's wife, and still more in the lives of

their children, this misery of the boot occurs and recurs—every year so many days."

We made a sort of classification of these troubles.

There is the TROUBLE OF THE NEW BOOT.

(i) They are made of some bad, unventilated material; and "draw the feet," as people say.

(ii) They do not fit exactly. Most people have to buy ready-made boots; they cannot afford others, and, in the submissive philosophy of poverty, they wear them to "get used" to them. This gives you the little-toe pinch, the big-toe pinch, the squeeze and swelling across the foot; and, as a sort of chronic development of these pressures, come corns and all the misery of corns. Children's feet get distorted for good by this method of fitting

the human being to the thing; and a vast number of people in the world are, as a consequence of this, ashamed to appear barefooted. (I used to press people who came to see me in warm pleasant weather to play Badminton barefooted on the grass—a delightful thing to do—until I found out that many were embarrassed at the thought of displaying twisted toes and corns, and such-like disfigurements.)

(iii) The third trouble of new boots is this: they are unseasoned and in bad condition, and so they squeak and make themselves an insulting commentary on one's ways.

But these are but trifling troubles to what arises as the boots get into wear. Then it is the pinch comes in earnest. Of these TROUBLES OF THE WORN BOOT, I and my friend, before he desisted, reckoned up three principal classes.

(i) There are the various sorts of chafe. Worst of the chafes is certainly the heel chafe, when something goes wrong with the upright support at the heel. This, as a boy, I have had to endure for days together; because there were no other boots for me. Then there is the chafe that comes when that inner lining of the boot rucks up—very like the chafe it is that poor people are always getting from over-darned and hastily-darned socks. And then there is the chafe that comes from ready-made boots one has got a trifle too large or long, in order to avoid the pinch and corns. After a little while, there comes a transverse crease across the loose-fitting forepart; and, when the boot stiffens from wet or any cause, it chafes across the base of the toes. They have you all ways. And I have a very lively recollection too

of the chafe of the knots one made to mend broken laces—one cannot be always buying new laces, and the knots used to work inward. And then the chafe of the crumpled tongue.

(ii) Then there are the miseries that come from the wear of the sole. There is the rick of ankle because the heel has gone over, and the sense of insecurity; and there is the miserable sense of not looking well from behind that many people must feel. It is almost always painful to me to walk behind girls who work out, and go to and fro, consuming much foot-wear, for this very reason, that their heels seem always to wear askew. Girls ought always to be so beautiful, most girls could be so beautiful, that to see their poor feet askew, the grace of their walk gone, a sort of spinal curvature induced, makes me wretched, and angry

with a world that treats them so. And then there is the working through of nails, nails in the shoe. One limps on manfully in the hope presently of a quiet moment and a quiet corner in which one may hammer the thing down again. Thirdly, under this heading I recall the flapping sole. My boots always came to that stage at last; I wore the toes out first, and then the sole split from before backwards. As one walked it began catching the ground. One made fantastic paces to prevent it happening; one was dreadfully ashamed. At last one was forced to sit by the wayside frankly, and cut the flap away.

(iii) Our third class of miseries we made of splitting and leaks. These are for the most part mental miseries, the feeling of shabbiness as one sees the ugly yawn, for example, between toe cap and

the main upper of the boot; but they involve also chills, colds, and a long string of disagreeable consequences. And we spoke too of the misery of sitting down to work (as multitudes of London school children do every wet morning) in boots with soles worn thin or into actual holes, that have got wet and chilling on the way to the work-place . . .

From these instances my mind ran on to others. I made a discovery. I had always despised the common run of poor Londoners for not spending their Sundays and holidays in sturdy walks, the very best of exercise. I had allowed myself to say when I found myself one summer day at Margate: "What a soft lot all these young people must be who loaf about the band-stand here, when they might be tramping over the Kentish hills inland!" But now I repented me of that.

Long tramps indeed! Their boots would have hurt them. Their boots would not stand it. I saw it all.

And now my discourse was fairly under way. *"Ex pede Herculem,"* I said; "these miseries of boots are no more than a sample. The clothes people wear are no better than their boots; and the houses they live in far worse. And think of the shoddy garment of ideas and misconceptions and partial statements into which their poor minds have been jammed by way of education! Think of the way *that* pinches and chafes them! If one expanded the miseries of these things . . . Think, for example, of the results of the poor, bad, unwise food, of badly-managed eyes and ears and teeth! Think of the quantity of toothache."

"I tell you, it does not *do* to think of such things!" cried my friend, in a sort of

anguish; and would have no more of it at any price . . .

And yet in his time he had written books full of these very matters, before despair overtook him.

CHAPTER II

PEOPLE WHOSE BOOTS DON'T HURT THEM

WELL, I did not talk merely to torment him; nor have I written this merely to torment you. You see I have a persistent persuasion that all these miseries are preventable miseries, which it lies in the power of men to cure.

Everybody does not suffer misery from boots.

One person I know, another friend of mine, who can testify to that; who has tasted all the miseries of boots, and who now goes about the world free of them, but not altogether forgetful of them. A stroke of luck, aided perhaps by a certain alacrity on his own part, lifted him

out of the class in which one buys one's boots and clothes out of what is left over from a pound a week, into the class in which one spends seventy or eighty pounds a year on clothing. Sometimes he buys shoes and boots at very good shops; sometimes he has them made for him; he has them stored in a proper cupboard, and great care is taken of them; and so his boots and shoes and slippers never chafe, never pinch, never squeak, never hurt nor worry him, never bother him; and, when he sticks out his toes before the fire, they do not remind him that he is a shabby and contemptible wretch, living meanly on the dust heaps of the world. You might think from this he had every reason to congratulate himself and be happy, seeing that he has had good follow after evil; but, such is the oddness of the human heart, he isn't contented at

all. The thought of the multitudes so much worse off than himself in this matter of foot-wear, gives him no sort of satisfaction. Their boots pinch *him* vicariously. The black rage with the scheme of things that once he felt through suffering in his own person in the days when he limped shabbily through gaily busy, fashionable London streets, in split boots that chafed, he feels now just as badly as he goes about the world very comfortably himself, but among people whom he knows with a pitiless clearness to be almost intolerably uncomfortable. He has no optimistic illusion that things are all right with them. Stupid people who have always been well off, who have always had boots that fit, may think that; but not so, he. In one respect the thought of boots makes him even more viciously angry now, than it used to do. In the old days

he was savage with his luck, but hopelessly savage; he thought that bad boots, ugly uncomfortable clothes, rotten houses, were in the very nature of things. Now, when he sees a child sniffing and blubbering and halting upon the pavement, or an old country-woman going painfully along a lane, he no longer recognises the Pinch of Destiny. His rage is lit by the thought, that there are fools in this world who ought to have foreseen and prevented this. He no longer curses fate, but the dulness of statesmen and powerful responsible people who have neither the heart, nor courage, nor capacity, to change the state of mismanagement that gives us these things.

Now do not think I am dwelling unduly upon my second friend's good fortune, when I tell you that once he was constantly getting pain and miserable

states of mind, colds for example, from the badness of his clothing, shame from being shabby, pain from the neglected state of his teeth, from the indigestion of unsuitable food eaten at unsuitable hours, from the insanitary ugly house in which he lived and the bad air of that part of London, from things indeed quite beyond the unaided power of a poor overworked man to remedy. And now all these disagreeable things have gone out of his life; he has consulted dentists and physicians, he has hardly any dull days from colds, no pain from toothache at all, no gloom of indigestion. . . .

I will not go on with the tale of good fortune of this lucky person. My purpose is served if I have shown that this misery of boots is not an unavoidable curse upon mankind. If one man can evade it, others can. By good manage-

ment it may be altogether escaped. If you, or what is more important to most human beings, if any people dear to you, suffer from painful or disfiguring boots or shoes, and you can do no better for them, it is simply because you are getting the worse side of an ill-managed world. It is not the universal lot.

And what I say of boots is true of all the other minor things of life. If your wife catches a bad cold because her boots are too thin for the time of the year, or dislikes going out because she cuts a shabby ugly figure, if your children look painfully nasty because their faces are swollen with toothache, or because their clothes are dirty, old, and ill-fitting, if you are all dull and disposed to be cross with one another for want of decent amusement and change of air—don't submit, don't be humbugged for a moment into

believing that this is the dingy lot of all mankind. Those people you love are living in a badly-managed world and on the wrong side of it; and such wretchednesses are the daily demonstration of that.

Don't say for a moment: "Such is life." Don't think their miseries are part of some primordial curse there is no escaping. The disproof of that is for any one to see. There are people, people no more deserving than others, who suffer from none of these things. You may feel you merit no better than to live so poorly and badly that your boots are always hurting you; but do the little children, the girls, the mass of decent hard-up people, deserve no better fate?

CHAPTER III

AT THIS POINT A DISPUTE ARISES

NOW let us imagine some one who will dispute what I am saying. I do not suppose any one will dispute my argument that a large part of the misery of civilised life—I do not say "all" but only a "large part"—arises out of the network of squalid insufficiencies of which I have taken this misery of boots as the simplest example. But I do believe quite a lot of people will be prepared to deny that such miseries can be avoided. They will say that every one cannot have the best of things, that of all sorts of good things, including good leather and cobbling, there is not enough to go round, that lower-class people ought not to mind

being shabby and uncomfortable, that they ought to be very glad to be able to live at all, considering what they are, and that it is no good stirring up discontent about things that cannot be altered or improved.

Such arguments are not to be swept aside with a wave of the hand. It is perfectly true that every one cannot have the best of things; and it is in the nature of things that some boots should be better and some worse. To some people, either by sheer good luck, or through the strength of their determination to have them, the exquisitely good boots, those of the finest leather and the most artistic cut, will fall. I have never denied that. Nobody dreams of a time when every one will have exactly as good boots as every one else; I am not preaching any such childish and impossible equality. But it

is a long way from recognising that there must be a certain picturesque and interesting variety in this matter of foot-wear, to the admission that a large majority of people can never hope for more than to be shod in a manner that is frequently painful, uncomfortable, unhealthy, or unsightly. That admission I absolutely refuse to make. There is enough good leather in the world to make good sightly boots and shoes for all who need them, enough men at leisure and enough power and machinery to do all the work required, enough unemployed intelligence to organise the shoemaking and shoe distribution for everybody. What stands in the way?

Let us put that question in a rather different form. Here on the one hand —you can see for yourself in any unfashionable part of Great Britain—are people badly, uncomfortably, painfully shod, in

old boots, rotten boots, sham boots; and on the other great stretches of land in the world, with unlimited possibilities of cattle and leather and great numbers of people, who, either through wealth or trade disorder, are doing no work. And our question is: "Why cannot the latter set to work and make and distribute boots?"

Imagine yourself trying to organise something of this kind of Free Booting expedition; and consider the difficulties you would meet with. You would begin by looking for a lot of leather. Imagine yourself setting off to South America, for example, to get leather; beginning at the very beginning by setting to work to kill and flay a herd of cattle. You find at once you are interrupted. Along comes your first obstacle in the shape of a man who tells you the cattle and the leather belong to him. You explain that

the leather is wanted for people who have no decent boots in England. He says he does not care a rap what you want it for; before you may take it from him you have to buy him off; it is his private property, this leather, and the herd and the land over which the herd ranges. You ask him how much he wants for his leather; and he tells you frankly, just as much as he can induce you to give.

If he chanced to be a person of exceptional sweetness of disposition, you might perhaps argue with him. You might point out to him that this project of giving people splendid boots was a fine one that would put an end to much human misery. He might even sympathise with your generous enthusiasm; but you would, I think, find him adamantine in his resolve to get just as much out of you

for his leather as you could with the utmost effort pay.

Suppose now you said to him: "But how did you come by this land and these herds, so that you can stand between them and the people who have need of them, exacting this profit?" He would probably either embark upon a long rigmarole, or, what is much more probable, lose his temper and decline to argue. Pursuing your doubt as to the rightfulness of his property in these things, you might admit he deserved a certain reasonable fee for the rough care he had taken of the land and herds. But cattle breeders are a rude, violent race; and it is doubtful if you would get far beyond your proposition of a reasonable fee. You would in fact have to buy off this owner of the leather at a good thumping price—he ex-

acting just as much as he could get from you—if you wanted to go on with your project.

Well, then you would have to get your leather here; and, to do that, you would have to bring it by railway and ship to this country. And here again you would find people without any desire or intention of helping your project, standing in your course, resolved to make every possible penny out of you on your way to provide sound boots for every one. You would find the railway was private property, and had an owner or owners; you would find the ship was private property, with an owner or owners; and that none of these would be satisfied for a moment with a mere fee adequate to their services. They too would be resolved to make every penny of profit out of you. If you made inquiries about the matter, you would

probably find the real owners of railway and ship were companies of shareholders, and that the profit squeezed out of your poor people's boots at this stage went to fill the pockets of old ladies at Torquay, spendthrifts in Paris, well-booted gentlemen in London clubs, all sorts of glossy people. . . .

Well, you get the leather to England at last; and now you want to make it into boots. You take it to a centre of population, invite workers to come to you, erect sheds and machinery upon a vacant piece of ground, and start off in a sort of fury of generous industry, boot-making. . . . Do you? There comes along an owner for that vacant piece of ground, declares it is his property, demands an enormous sum for rent. And your workers all round you, you find, cannot get house room until they too have paid rent—every

inch of the country is somebody's property, and a man may not shut his eyes for an hour without the consent of some owner or other. And the food your shoemakers eat, the clothes they wear, have all paid tribute and profit to land-owners, cart-owners, house-owners, endless tribute over and over and above the fair pay for work that has been done upon them. . . .

So one might go on. But you begin to see now one set of reasons at least why every one has not good comfortable boots. There could be plenty of leather; and there is certainly plenty of labour and quite enough intelligence in the world to manage that and a thousand other desirable things. But this institution of Private Property in land and naturally produced things, these obstructive claims that prevent you using ground, or moving material, and that have to be bought out

at exorbitant prices, stand in the way. All these owners hang like parasites upon your enterprise at its every stage; and, by the time you get your sound boots well made in England, you will find them costing about a pound a pair—high out of the reach of the general mass of people. And you will perhaps not think me fanciful and extravagant when I confess that when I realise this, and look at poor people's boots in the street, and see them cracked and misshapen and altogether nasty, I seem to see also a lot of little phantom land-owners, cattle-owners, house-owners, owners of all sorts, swarming over their pinched and weary feet like leeches, taking much and giving nothing, and being the real cause of all such miseries.

Now is this a necessary and unavoidable thing?—that is our question. Is

there no other way of managing things than to let these property-owners exact their claims, and squeeze comfort, pride, happiness, out of the lives of the common run of people? Because, of course, it is not only the boots they squeeze into meanness and badness. It is the claim and profit of the land-owner and house-owner that make our houses so ugly, shabby, and dear, that make our roadways and railways so crowded and inconvenient, that sweat our schools, our clothing, our food —boots we took merely by way of one example of a universal trouble.

Well, there are a number of people who say there is a better way and that the world could be made infinitely better in all these matters, made happier and better than it ever has been in these respects, by refusing to have private property in all

these universally necessary things. They say that it is possible to have the land administered, and such common and needful things as leather produced, and boots manufactured, and no end of other such generally necessary services carried on, not for the private profit of individuals, but for the good of all. They propose that the State should take away the land, and the railways, and shipping, and many great organised enterprises from their owners, who use them simply to squeeze the means for a wasteful private expenditure out of the common mass of men, and should administer all these things, generously and boldly, not for profit, but for service. It is this idea of extracting *profit* they hold which is the very root of the evil. These are the Socialists; and they are the only people who do hold out

any hope of far-reaching change that will alter the present dingy state of affairs, of which this painful wretchedness of boots is only one typical symbol.

CHAPTER IV

IS SOCIALISM POSSIBLE?

I WILL not pretend to be impartial in this matter, and to discuss as though I had an undecided mind, whether the world would be better if we could abolish private property in land and in many things of general utility; because I have no doubt left in the matter. I believe that private property in these things is no more necessary and unavoidable than private property in our fellow-creatures, or private property in bridges and roads. The idea that anything and everything may be claimed as private property belongs to the dark ages of the world; and it is not only a monstrous injustice, but a still more monstrous incon-

venience. Suppose we still admitted private property in high roads, and let every man who had a scrap of high road haggle a bargain with us before we could drive by in a cab! You say life would be unendurable. But indeed it amounts to something a little like that if we use a railway now; and it is quite like that if one wants a spot of ground somewhere upon which one may live. I see no more difficulty in managing land, factories, and the like, publicly for the general good, than there is in managing roads and bridges, and the post office and the police. So far I see no impossibility whatever in Socialism. To abolish private property in these things would be to abolish all that swarm of parasites, whose greed for profit and dividend hampers and makes a thousand useful and delightful enterprises costly or hopeless. It would

abolish them; but is that any objection whatever?

And as for taking such property from the owners; why shouldn't we? The world has not only in the past taken slaves from their owners, with no compensation or with a meagre compensation; but in the history of mankind, dark as it is, there are innumerable cases of slave-owners resigning their inhuman rights. You may say that to take away property from people is unjust and robbery; but is that really so? Suppose you found a number of children in a nursery all very dull and unhappy because one of them, who had been badly spoilt, had got all the toys together and claimed them all, and refused to let the others have any. Would you not dispossess the child, however honest its illusion that it was right to be greedy? That is practically the po-

sition of the property-owner to-day. You may say, if you choose, that property-owners, land-owners for example, must be bought out and not robbed; but since getting the money to buy them out involves taxing the property of some one else, who may possibly have a better claim to it than the land-owner to his, I don't quite see where the honesty of that course comes in. You can only give property for property in buying and selling; and if private property is not robbery, then not only Socialism but ordinary taxation must be. But if taxation is a justifiable proceeding, if you can tax me (as I am taxed) for public services, a shilling and more out of every twenty shillings I earn, then I do not see why you should not put a tax upon the land-owner if you want to do so, of a half or two thirds or all his land, or upon the railway share-holder of

ten or fifteen or twenty shillings in the pound on his shares. In every change some one has to bear the brunt; every improvement in machinery and industrial organisation deprives some poor people of an income; and I do not see why we should be so extraordinarily tender to the rich, to those who have been unproductive all their lives, when they stand in the way of the general happiness. And though I deny the right to compensation I do not deny its probable advisability. So far as the question of method goes it is quite conceivable that we may partially compensate the property owners and make all sorts of mitigating arrangements to avoid cruelty to them in our attempt to end the wider cruelties of to-day.

But, apart from the justice of the case, many people seem to regard Socialism as a hopeless dream, because, as they put

it, "it is against human nature." Every one with any scrap of property in land, or shares, or what not, they tell us, will be bitterly opposed to the coming of Socialism; and, as such people have all the leisure and influence in the world, and as all able and energetic people tend naturally to join that class, there never can be any effectual force to bring Socialism about. But that seems to me to confess a very base estimate of human nature. There are, no doubt, a number of dull, base, rich people who hate and dread Socialism for purely selfish reasons; but it is quite possible to be a property owner and yet be anxious to see Socialism come to its own.

For example, the man whose private affairs I know best in the world, the second friend I named, the owner of all those comfortable boots, gives time and

energy and money to further this hope of Socialism, although he pays income tax on twelve hundred a year, and has shares and property to the value of some thousands of pounds. And that he does out of no instinct of sacrifice. He believes he would be happier and more comfortable in a Socialistic state of affairs, when it would not be necessary for him to hold on to that life-belt of invested property. He finds it—and quite a lot of well-off people are quite of his way of thinking—a constant flaw upon a life of comfort and pleasant interests to see so many people, who might be his agreeable friends and associates, detestably under-educated, detestably housed, in the most detestable clothes and boots, and so detestably broken in spirit that they will not treat him as an equal. It makes him feel he is like that spoilt child in the nursery;

he feels ashamed and contemptible; and, since individual charity only seems in the long run to make matters worse, he is ready to give a great deal of his life, and lose his entire little heap of possessions if need be, very gladly lose it, to change the present order of things in a comprehensive manner.

I am quite convinced that there are numbers of much richer and more influential people who are of his way of thinking. Much more likely to obstruct the way to Socialism is the ignorance, the want of courage, the stupid want of imagination of the very poor, too shy and timid and clumsy to face any change they can evade! But, even with them, popular education is doing its work; and I do not fear but that in the next generation we shall find Socialists even in the slums.

The unimaginative person who owns some little bit of property, an acre or so of freehold land, or a hundred pounds in the savings bank, will no doubt be the most tenacious passive resister to Socialistic ideas; and such, I fear, we must reckon, together with the insensitive rich, as our irreconcilable enemies, as irremovable pillars of the present order. The mean and timid elements in "human nature" are, and will be, I admit, against Socialism; but they are not all "human nature," not half human nature. And when, in the whole history of the world, have meanness and timidity won a struggle? It is passion, it is enthusiasm, and indignation that mould the world to their will—and I cannot see how any one can go into the back streets of London, or any large British town, and not be filled up with

shame, and passionate resolve to end so grubby and mean a state of affairs as is displayed there.

I don't think the "human nature" argument against the possibility of Socialism will hold water.

CHAPTER V

SOCIALISM MEANS REVOLUTION

LET us be clear about one thing: that Socialism means revolution, that it means a change in the every-day texture of life. It may be a very gradual change, but it will be a very complete one. You cannot change the world, and at the same time not change the world. You will find Socialists about, or at any rate men calling themselves Socialists, who will pretend that this is not so, who will assure you that some odd little jobbing about municipal gas and water is Socialism, and back-stairs intervention between Conservative and Liberal the way to the millennium. You might as well call a

gas jet in the lobby of a meeting-house, the glory of God in Heaven!

Socialism aims to change, not only the boots on people's feet, but the clothes they wear, the houses they inhabit, the work they do, the education they get, their places, their honours, and all their possessions. Socialism aims to make a new world out of the old. It can only be attained by the intelligent, outspoken, courageous resolve of a great multitude of men and women. You must get absolutely clear in your mind that Socialism means a complete change, a break with history, with much that is picturesque; whole classes will vanish. The world will be vastly different, with a different sort of houses, different sorts of people. All the different trades and industries will be changed, the medical profession will be carried on under different conditions, en-

gineering, science, the theatrical trade, the clerical trade, schools, hotels, almost every trade, will have to undergo as complete an internal change as a caterpillar does when it becomes a moth. If you are afraid of so much change as that, it is better you should funk about it now than later. The whole system has to be changed, if we are to get rid of the masses of dull poverty that render our present state detestable to any sensitive man or woman. That, and no less, is the aim of all sincere Socialists: the establishment of a new and better order of society by the abolition of private property in land, in natural productions, and in their exploitation—a change as profound as the abolition of private property in slaves would have been in ancient Rome or Athens. If you demand less than that, if you are not prepared to struggle for that, you are not

really a Socialist. If you funk that, then you must make up your mind to square your life to a sort of personal and private happiness with things as they are, and decide with my other friend that "it doesn't do to think about boots."

It is well to insist upon one central idea. Socialism is a common-sense, matter-of-fact proposal to change our conventional admission of what is or is not property, and to re-arrange the world according to these revised conceptions. A certain number of clever people, dissatisfied with the straightforwardness of this, have set themselves to put it in some brilliant obscure way; they will tell you that Socialism is based on the philosophy of Hegel, or that it turns on a theory of Rent, or that it is somehow muddled up with a sort of white Bogey called the Overman, and all sorts of brilliant, nonsensical, unap-

petising things. The theory of Socialism, so far as English people are concerned, seems to have got up into the clouds, and its practice down into the drains; and it is well to warn inquiring men, that neither the epigram above nor the job beneath are more than the accidental accompaniments of Socialism. Socialism is a very large, but a plain, honest, and human enterprise; its ends are to be obtained neither by wit nor cunning, but by outspoken resolve, by the self-abnegation, the enthusiasm, and the loyal cooperation of great masses of people.

The main thing, therefore, is the creation of these great masses of people out of the intellectual confusion and vagueness of the present time. Let me suppose that you find yourself in sympathy with this tract, that you, like my second friend, find the shabby dullness, the posi-

tive misery of a large proportion of the population of our world, make life under its present conditions almost intolerable, and that it is in the direction of Socialism that the only hope of a permanent remedy lies. What are we to do? Obviously to give our best energies to making other people Socialists, to organising ourselves with all other Socialists, irrespective of class or the minor details of creed, and to making ourselves audible, visible, effectual as Socialists, wherever and whenever we can.

We have to think about Socialism, read about it, discuss it; so that we may be assured and clear and persuasive about it. We have to confess our faith openly and frequently. We must refuse to be called Liberal or Conservative, Republican or Democrat, or any of those ambiguous things. Everywhere we must make or

join a Socialist organisation, a club or association or what not, so that we may "count." For us, as for the early Christians, preaching our gospel is the supreme duty. Until Socialists can be counted, and counted upon by the million, little will be done. When they are—a new world will be ours.

Above all, if I may offer advice to a fellow-Socialist, I would say: Cling to the simple essential idea of Socialism, which is the abolition of private property in anything but what a man has earned or made. Do not complicate your cause with elaborations. And keep in your mind, if you can, some sort of talisman to bring you back to that essential gospel, out of the confusions and warring suggestions of every-day discussion.

For my own part, I have, as I said at the beginning, a prepossession with boots;

and my talisman is this:—The figure of a badly fed but rather pretty little girl of ten or eleven, dirty, and her hands coarse with rough usage, her poor pretty child's body in ungainly rags, and, on her feet, big broken-down boots that hurt her. And particularly I think of her wretched sticks of legs and the limp of her feet; and all those phantom owners and profit-takers I spoke of, they are there about her martyrdom, leech-like, clinging to her as she goes. . . .

I want to change everything in the world that made that; and I do not greatly care what has to go in the process. Do you?

H. G. WELLS.

[Here is just a bit of hard fact to carry out what I say. It is a quotation from a letter from a workman to my friend Mr.

Chiozza Money, one of the best informed writers upon labour questions in England:

"I am a railway man, in constant work at 30s. per week. I am the happy, or otherwise, father of six healthy children. Last year I bought twenty pairs of boots. This year, up to date, I have bought ten pairs, costing £2; and yet, at the present time, my wife and five of the children have only one pair each. I have two pairs, both of which let in the water; but I see no prospect at present of getting new ones. I ought to say, of course, that my wife is a thoroughly domesticated woman, and I am one of the most temperate of men. So much so, that if all I spend in luxuries was saved it would not buy a pair of boots once a year. But this is the point I want to mention. During 1903 my wages were 25s. 6d per week; and I then had the six children. My next-door neighbour was a boot-maker and repairer. He fell out of work, and was out for months. During that time, of course, my children's boots needed repairing as at other times. I had not the money to pay for them being repaired, so had to do what repairing I could my-

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self. One day I found out that I was repairing boots on one side of the wall, and my neighbour on the other side out of work, and longing to do the work I was compelled to do myself. . . ."

The wall was a commercial organisation of society based on private property in land and natural productions. These two men must work for the owners or not at all; they cannot work for one another. Food first, then rent; and boots, if you can, when all the owners are paid.]

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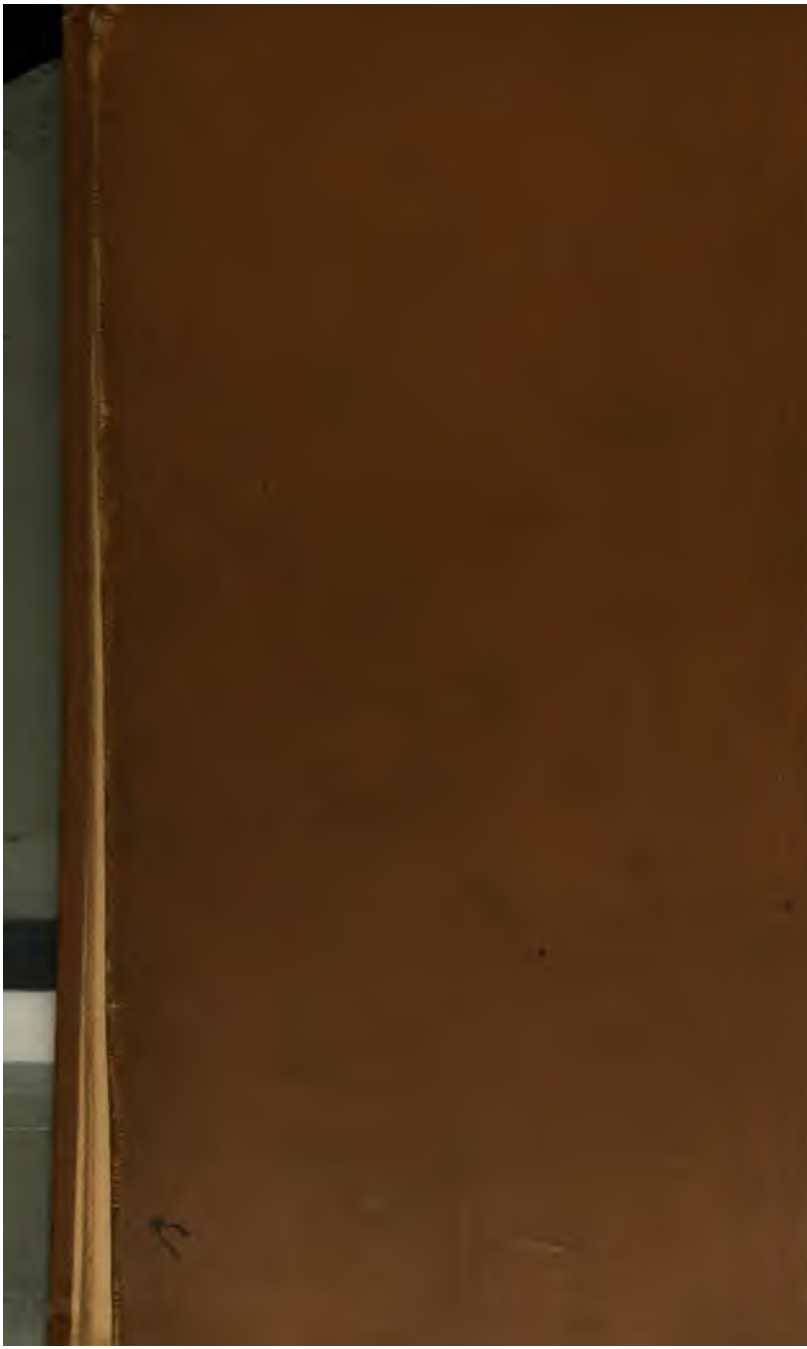
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